

Amanda Watson

Mobile applications for literary study

There's an app for that

As more people read books on mobile devices, e-reader apps and downloadable books have proliferated. Search the iTunes Store or Google Play and you'll find dozens of apps offering the text of classic works of literature. Chances are, if you use a mobile device, you're already using an e-reader, whether it's the Kindle app, iBooks, or something else. But what about apps that take the reading experience a few steps further, by adding additional layers of multimedia, scholarly commentary, or interactivity to the experience?

As a literature subject librarian who recently started experimenting with using an iPad, I'm always keeping an eye out for apps with a literary focus. High-quality apps aimed at users interested in literature can be hard to find, but a growing number of developers are creating them, with some amazing examples already available.

In compiling this list, I looked for apps that offer more than just the text of a literary work, enriching the reading experience with audio or video, notes and introductory essays, or archival images. I also looked for good editing and an appealing user interface. As "augmented editions" of literary texts are still a bit hard to come by, I've also included a few useful apps for related activities: conducting academic research and finding new books to read. Most of the apps I'll discuss in this column were developed for iOS devices, but some of them are made for Android devices, some are available across platforms, and in a few cases, Android versions are on their way.

One word of warning: both the iTunes Store and Google Play can be frustrating to browse if you're looking for apps in a general category, as opposed to looking for a specific app. Sometimes it's easier to find out about new apps via Google, technology blogs, or word of mouth.

Book recommendations

- **Goodreads.** For iOS and Android. Free. This is not, strictly speaking, an app for literary study, but it's a great one to have if you're looking for recommendations for books to read or a way to keep track of what you're currently reading and want to read next. Goodreads is the app version of the popular book review site Goodreads, and offers many of the same features: you can search for a book, view other users' reviews of it, add it to your to-read list, and track your progress in books that you're reading. The iOS version has an integrated ebook reader, though the real value of this app is in the reader reviews and social features. *Access:* <http://goodreads.com>.

Rare books and manuscripts

- **E-codices.** For iOS. Free. Created by the Virtual Manuscript Library of Switzerland, a project overseen by the Swiss Academy of

Amanda Watson is librarian for English and Comparative Literature at New York University's Elmer Holmes Bobst Library, e-mail: amanda.watson@nyu.edu

© 2013 Amanda Watson

Humanities and Social Sciences. The core of this app is a collection of zoomable images of more than 900 medieval manuscripts held in libraries in Switzerland. These can be searched or browsed by location, language, and century of origin, among other options. There are no transcripts (a feature that would have been nice), but the app does include a detailed description of each manuscript, with bibliography in some cases. Medievalists, particularly those with an interest in any of the manuscripts included in this collection, will appreciate this one. *Access:* <http://www.e-codices.unifr.ch/>.

- **Treasures of the Bodleian.** For iOS and Android. Free. Created by the Bodleian Library, this app was designed to accompany an exhibition of the same name; some of its features are only useful if you're at the Bodleian itself, but the "Treasures" section has a wealth of high-resolution images of manuscripts and early editions, including drafts by Jane Austen, Wilfred Owen, John Donne, and Gerard Manley Hopkins. A video introduction features various experts from Oxford University discussing the importance of treasures from the exhibition. Recommended for anyone interested in literature or history, and for anyone with plans to visit the Bodleian. *Access:* <http://apps.toura.com/bodleian-library-at-oxford/treasures-of-the-bodleian>.

Fiction

- **Frankenstein: The Afterlife of Shelley's Circle.** For iPad. Free. Created by the New York Public Library as part of a series called "Biblion: The Boundless Library." This app draws on the New York Public Library's Pforzheimer Collection of Shelley and His Circle to present a wealth of commentary on Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and a transcript of the 1831 edition. Essays explore the novel's creation, contemporary reactions to it, Shelley's relationships to other writers of the Romantic period, and later adaptations of *Frankenstein*, including stage and film. There are also audio recordings of parts of the novel, maps of locations, and a large number of images—including Shelley's handwritten

draft of *Frankenstein*. There's even a short graphic novel about Shelley's life. There's an enormous amount of information in this app, and one can easily spend hours exploring it. It's occasionally tricky to navigate, but the richness of the content more than makes up for it. *Access:* <http://exhibitions.nypl.org/biblion/outside>.

- **LOTR Project.** For Android devices. \$1.50. Emil Johansson, a J.R.R. Tolkien fan and engineering student in Sweden, has built a huge, fascinating site about Tolkien's *The*



Hobbit and *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy (<http://lotrproject.com/>), including timelines, detailed maps of Middle-Earth, genealogical charts for more than 900 characters in the novels, and data visualizations showing everything from the life expectancy of a hobbit to the frequency with which characters appear in the same scenes together. The Android app, billed as "One App to Rule Them All," offers many of these features, including the genealogies and maps, plus news from Tolkien fan sites and a "Today in Middle-Earth" feature. Fans of *Lord of the Rings* will definitely want to check out both the app and the site. *Access:* <http://lotrproject.com/app>.

- **On the Road.** For iPad. \$16.99. Created by Penguin Books. This "Amplified Edition" of Jack Kerouac's 1957 novel *On the Road* includes annotations, an introduction, biographies, sound clips of Kerouac reading from the novel, many images of archival documents (including parts of Kerouac's draft of the novel on a 120-foot scroll, and pages from Kerouac's journals) and even a map of the characters' cross-country road trips. *Access:* http://www.us.penguin.com/static/pages/features/amplified_editions/on_the_road.html.

Poetry

- **Poetry.** For iOS and Android. Free. Created by the Poetry Foundation, this app provides a mixture of classic poems and selections from *Poetry* magazine. You can search or browse by poet, mood, or subject.

Personally, I don't find the subject categories especially useful, but it's a good, attractive, free anthology with some entertaining features like the "Discover" screen, which generates semi-random collections of poems based on subject and mood. The juxtapositions of older and newer poems can be very interesting. You can also get a random poem by shaking your phone. *Access:* <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/mobile/>.

- **Poems By Heart.** For iOS. Free, but additional poems beyond the two that come preloaded with the app must be purchased in four-poem bundles for \$0.99 each. Created by Penguin Books, this app teaches users how to memorize poetry, using a gamified approach. Select a poem (the poets in the "Poetry Store" run heavily to the Romantics and Victorians but also include Shakespeare, Wallace Stevens, John Donne, and Dante), click "Learn This," listen to a recording of the poem being read, and progress through a series of exercises in which you fill in missing words for each line of the poem until you've learned the entire thing. The app also lets you record your own recitation of a poem once you've finished memorizing it. *Access:* http://www.us.penguin.com/static/pages/features/amplified_editions/poems_by_heart_app.html.

- **The Sonnets by William Shakespeare.** For iPad. \$3.99. Created by Faber & Faber, the Arden Shakespeare, and Touch Press, this app includes the full text of all 154 of Shakespeare's sonnets; an introduction and notes from the Arden Shakespeare edition; a complete facsimile of the 1609 First Quarto edition of the sonnets; commentary by poets, directors, and Shakespeare critics; and video performances by various famous stage and screen actors (including *Doctor Who*'s David Tennant and *Star Trek: The Next Generation*'s Sir Patrick Stewart, among many others) reciting the sonnets. This is a terrific use of the multimedia to bring a literary work to life. *Access:* <http://www.touchpress.com/titles/shakespeares-sonnets/>.

- **The Waste Land.** For iPad. \$13.99. Created by Faber & Faber and Touch Press,

this multimedia edition includes not only the complete text of T. S. Eliot's poem "The Waste Land" but also a facsimile of Eliot's manuscript of the poem, commentary by writers and scholars, and audio (featuring Eliot's own reading, among others). One of the most striking features is a video performance of the entire poem by the actress Fiona Shaw, who previously performed the poem on stage in London. The user can watch the whole performance, jump around between parts of the poem, or switch on the audio while reading. This is a fascinating app to wander around in. *Access:* <http://www.touchpress.com/titles/thewasteland/>.

Drama

- **The Tempest.** For iPad. \$9.99. This app was created by the Luminary Project and the University of Notre Dame's Center for Research Computing. Actors, scholars, and librarians from the Folger Shakespeare Library all collaborated on this edition of Shake-

The Tempest

speare's *The Tempest*. It allows the user to read the play, listen to a complete recorded performance and compare different audio versions, consult commentary by Shakespeare scholars, make and share their own notes on the play, and view images from the Folger Shakespeare Library. A "Roles" feature, aimed at actors, allows users to see all the lines for a particular character. I would have liked to see more video in this app (it would be great to see as well as hear the actors perform), but the existing features are very exciting, and I'm looking forward to the makers' future projects. According to their blog, more interactive Shakespeare editions are on the way. *Access:* <http://luminarydigitalmedia.com/>.

Reading and research

If you're using these apps to study literature, you may also want to explore apps that help you with researching secondary sources. Apps for scholarly research are still relatively scarce, but some of them are highly promis-

ing. Here are a couple of my favorites.

• **BrowZine.** For iPad and Android. Free. This app provides an interface for selected academic journals in the arts, humanities, social sciences, sciences, and law. If your library offers access to BrowZine, you can use it to browse a selection of journals organized by academic discipline. (Not every library does, which is the main drawback to this app.) You can then bookmark favorite journals, save articles to return to them later, and open them in BrowZine or in other applications. The selection of literature journals keeps expanding, with a variety of subdisciplines represented. In addition to journals focused on literary criticism (*ELH*, *SEL*, and *Review of English Studies* among them), BrowZine also includes a number of creative writing journals, such as *Ploughshares*, *Prairie Schoo-*

ner, and *The Sewanee Review*. Access: <http://thirdiron.com/browzine/>.

• **iAnnotate PDF.** For iPad and Android. \$9.99 for iPad; currently free for Android, with a fuller-featured Android version to come. iAnnotate lets you view PDFs you've downloaded, mark them up with a wide range of tools (typed notes, freehand underlinings, even voice notes), and then save your annotations. This app can sync with the cloud storage application Dropbox, so your writing and note-taking can automatically update across multiple computers. If you do any kind of research that involves PDFs of journal articles or primary documents, or if you like to download PDFs of obscure Victorian novels from Google Books or HathiTrust to read later, this can be a lifesaver. Access: <http://www.branchfire.com/iannotate/>. *rw*

Meet the Faces of New Librarianship

The School of Library and Information Studies



WISCONSIN
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

- **Affordable, online or on-campus MA programs**
- **Nationally ranked, academically rigorous, and ALA-accredited**
- **100 years of leadership in LIS education**



www.slis.wisc.edu